



SELLING EATALY

Slow food retailer Eataly has opened a flagship in a former Milanese theatre, and the store's emphasis on creating a 'show' in keeping with its location is proving a success. John Ryan reports

EATALY SMERALDO, MILAN

Address Piazza XXV Aprile
Opened March 18, 2014
Number of floors Three
Number of Eatalys globally 27
Other Eataly presences in Milan
 Brian & Barry Building,
 Coin department store – Cinque Giornate
Ambiance Theatrical

Here's a proposition that might not appeal to some. Imagine taking a large, multi-floor space where the bulk of the selling area will be around the perimeter and there will be a large void at the centre of the store.

This is, in fact, the model for an old-style theatre. The central pit is where the stalls are located and further seats are found in ascending tiers all the way up to 'the gods.' On the face of it, this would seem a rather extravagant use of floor space for a retailer, albeit it would yield a spectacular central atrium.

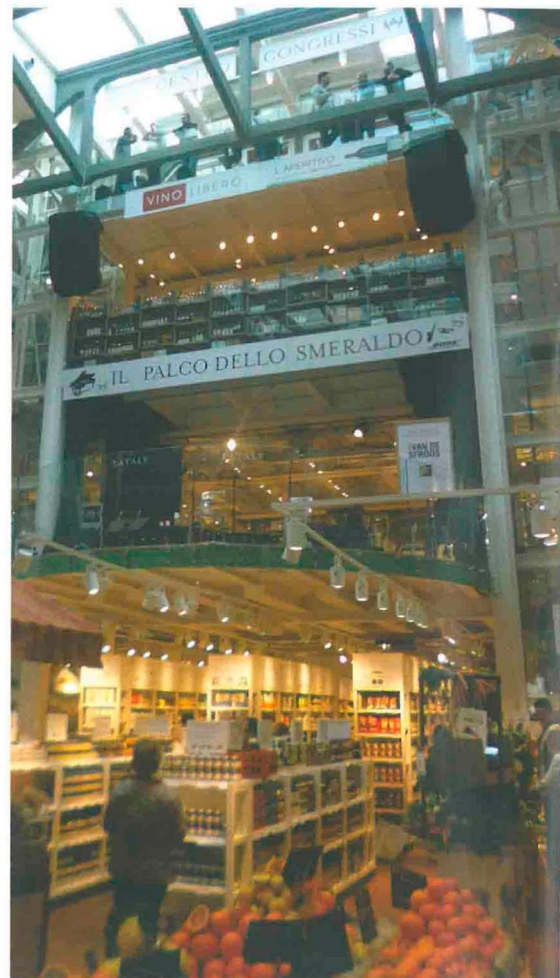
There is considerable precedent for this kind

of thing, however, with the Urban Outfitters store in Stockholm standing as the prime example. That said, the number of theatres that are turned into shops remains limited. Now there is a new example; it's in a building that first opened in 1942 and which ended its theatrical life in 2012.

The Teatro Smeraldo in Milan has reopened as the latest offering from Italian slow food emporium Eataly. In its former life, this was a cinema. It then became a music venue where the likes of David Bowie, Pavarotti and Bruce Springsteen all did their thing. And the sense



About 40% of the products on offer in Eataly are sourced locally



TO THE ITALIANS

of an auditorium has been preserved in its new life, with a small stage, located on the first level, providing a platform for singers who perform to shoppers daily.

Eataly founder and owner Oscar Farinetti seems at ease in his new store: "We only open an Eataly when we have the right location," he says, adding: "I want to open in London, but it has to be the right location." Farinetti says that as well as this store being a shop, it is also a series of shows – in keeping with the building's theatrical antecedents: "There's a mozzarella show, a pasta show, a bread show, a music show. For me it's very important to bring to mind the memory of a particular location."

In the Smeraldo store, this means that the product areas and restaurants have been laid out in a manner where each functions almost

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Oscar Farinetti, founder and owner, Eataly

as a shop-in-shop. It also means that the store is different from any of the other Eatalys found in Italy, or internationally for that matter. Farinetti makes the point that Eataly is "not a chain. It's not like Starbucks or McDonald's". He says that one of the reasons for the relatively ponderous pace of expansion of what is undoubtedly one of the more spectacular international retail success stories of recent years is the desire that every Eataly should be different: "It is one family, but with many brothers," Farinetti says.

It is certainly the case that a point-of-sale system and product range has been developed for Eataly that means whether you're in New York, Dubai, Chicago or Turin, the buildings might all differ wildly, but you would at least know where you are.

Yet stand outside Eataly Smeraldo and it ▶

is the structure, built in the Italian fascist era, that dominates. A large glass protruberance has been added to the frontage that allows views into the store and across which a large logo has been spread. Above this, there are views of diners enjoying an upscale bite at the 'starred' Alice restaurant, where a nouvelle cuisine view of Lombardy is on offer. But most of all, it is the sense of this store being a spectacle that comes to mind.

Now step into the store and the first thing that is apparent beyond the supermarket checkout-style cash counters inside the entrance is a series of market stalls, complete with striped awnings. This is the home of the fresh fruit and vegetable offer, and it is not cheap when set

against the offerings of Milan's many markets. But what has to be borne in mind is that this store is almost like a theme park for Italian food.

CENTRE STAGE

The intention seems to be that when you enter Eataly Smeraldo a primacy is placed on experience ahead of product. The product will be good, but this is a place where anything and everything that is related to Italian food is on show. Which in turn probably means that trifling considerations about the price of pasta, mozzarella or tomatoes disappear as a customer progresses around the store's many elements.

And the feeling of being part of a show is

preserved thanks to the escalators to the upper levels being located either side of the central pit. Ride these and the store becomes the show, with views across everything from a wall that runs with liquid chocolate to fresh pasta-making. 'Retail theatre' is a hackneyed and somewhat dated term, but this is exactly what has been created in this shop. Those who decide to have a meal in any of the several restaurants scattered around the store become part of the spectacle and are viewed as much as they do the viewing.

There would, of course, not be room for this kind of thing in every town or city. The proposition relies on a relatively well-heeled metropolitan elite who care less about price than they



Each product area has been laid out to function almost as a shop-in-shop





Shoppers can choose from a number of different restaurants in Eataly Smeraldo

Owner Oscar Farinetti claims Eataly is not just a shop but a series of shows

do about enjoying themselves as they make a 'foodie' tour around a shop. There are also only so many buildings that would be suitable for an Eataly.

Yet it is a mark of Eataly's appeal that Farinetti's 'coals to Newcastle' approach means he can sell Italian cuisine to Italians in Italy. All of the ingredients in Smeraldo are readily available elsewhere, but the whole is probably greater than the sum of the parts.

Farinetti also makes the point that about 40% of the products on offer in an Eataly are sourced locally. Clearly this can work in a region such as Lombardy, which has a broad range of agricultural products coming from an area with a benign climate. But it will be interesting to see whether this ethos can be maintained when, and if, he does manage to find suitable northern European premises.

For the moment anyway, sophisticated Milanese palates have a new outlet in which to indulge what is a local passion: rich and delicious food. ●